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AUTHOR Bass, Randall V.; Bass, Jo Ann F.
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ABSTRACT

The prospective student's decision to choose an education major is influenced by a number of factors: prestige versus the perceived difficulties of the job, the quality of the program offered, and the costs involved. A vigorous and sound public relations program is recommended. Suggestions are made for developing appealing and truthful outreach based on the benefits and rewards of choosing a major in education. Such methods as newsletters and news releases, college-sponsored activities to bring prospective students to campus, and faculty involvement in elementary and secondary schools are described. The importance of economic aid and scholarships is also discussed. Other recruitment efforts include faculty outreach, special programs for undecided majors, and effective introductory courses. Whatever techniques are used, the goal is to bring the best students possible into the teacher education program. (JD)

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Strategies for Recruiting Education Majors in the 1990's

Randall V. Bass
Arkansas State University
and
Jo Ann F. Bass
Arkansas State University

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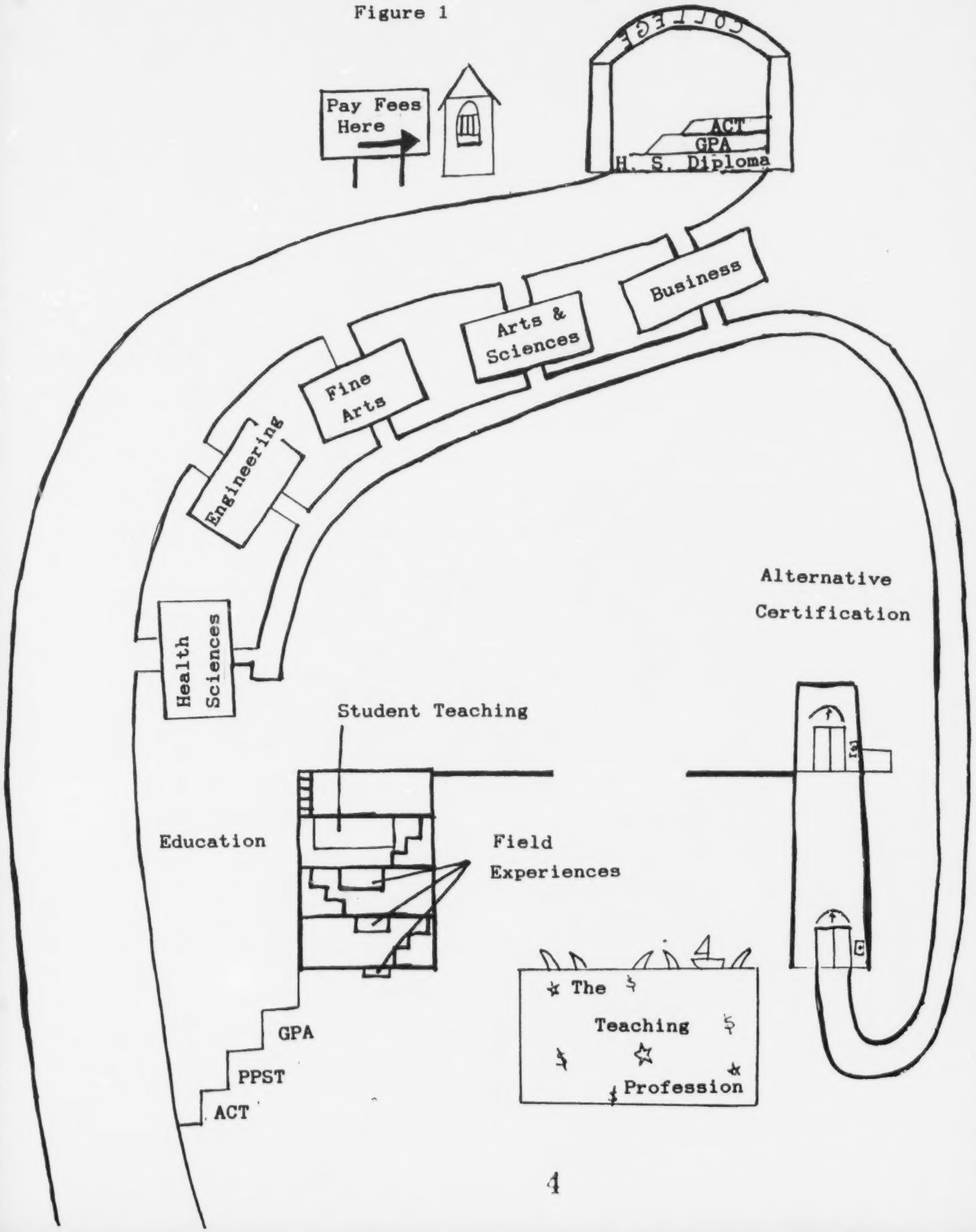
Strategies for Recruiting Education Majors in the 1990's

Over the next three years, the number of eighteen-year-olds will decrease by 17 percent. During this same period, the number of adults most likely to attend college will also be declining (Levine & Associates, 1989). Meanwhile, the chorus of public outcry for improvements in education includes demands that colleges of education turn out better teachers. One of the reactions to the demand for better teachers is to stiffen the requirements for admission into programs of teacher education.

If education continues to attract the interest of the same proportion of college students as in the past, then obviously the number of students wanting to enter education programs will decrease. Given the higher standards for admission, a smaller proportion of those students will be accepted into the programs. The net result will be significantly fewer students in teacher education programs. It should be noted that raising the standards for admission to the program may in the long run increase the prestige of teaching and thus increase the number of students interested in education. Such an effect may be offset, however, if alternative certification procedures make it easier to enter the profession.

To figure out what can be done to recruit more of the best and the brightest into education, let's first take a look at a conceptual model (See Figure 1). The gate in this model represents entry into college. After meeting all the requirements

Figure 1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for entry, the student must pay the costs. Once the student is in college, entry into the education program has other requirements (steps up to door). Once in the program, the student progresses through various courses and activities designed to prepare him or her to be a teacher. Teaching is represented by the large pool outside the building, so laboratory and field experiences are represented by the small pools inside the building. After completing student teaching and graduating, the student is ready to take the plunge into teaching. The shark fins in the pool represent the pitfalls of teaching. Onboard the boat are the various programs designed to assist teachers, such as first year out programs, cooperatives, workshops, etc. The dollar signs represent the teacher's pay and the stars symbolize the prestige of teaching. Notice their small size. The tower on the right with the elevator represents the alternative certification process as it is sometimes practiced.

This model illustrates a number of factors which affect a prospective student's decision to enter education. Pay and prestige versus the perceived difficulties of the job are major factors. The perceived quality of the program is another. Is the program properly structured, using the right sequence of experiences with appropriate increases in the level of difficulty? What are the faculty members' qualifications? How good is the instruction? Do students get appropriate advising? How do currently enrolled students feel about the program? Anything which can be done to improve the situation or any part of it will make education more attractive to prospective students.

Students are not likely to want to enter a program of study if they think the courses are dull, poorly taught, or irrelevant. Those responsible for education programs must make certain that these programs are really preparing students to be teachers and that course content is taught in an interesting way. Assigning the poorest teachers to teach introductory courses is not a wise approach, unless the object is to test a student's motivation to become a teacher. If the courses are dull and irrelevant, those who can do something else will do it.

A number of things can be done by teacher education personnel to recruit more good students into education programs. Probably the most important single factor in recruiting is public relations. You may have the greatest program in existence, but if nobody knows about it, it will not attract students.

Public relations is not a technique for selling snake oil. In fact, the worst possible public relations program in the long run is one which does not tell the truth. A good public relations program informs the public about what is going on in the organization, in this case, the teacher education program.

Newsletters are an excellent public relations tool. They are not easy to do, nor are they cheap, but done properly, they can pay tremendous dividends in the long run. They should be addressed to specific audiences. Don't try to do one newsletter and send it to alumni, current students, area teachers, friends of education, and everyone else whose name and address is in your files. If you can only produce one newsletter, do it for area

teachers. They are in a position to influence their students and they may become students in your program. Current students should be addressed by a newsletter if possible. Include those in the teacher education program as well as others who have expressed an interest in teaching. This is an excellent way of informing students of deadlines, requirements, services offered, program changes, and upcoming events. Features on students, faculty members, and recent graduates are good points of interest.

News releases are another important tool in public relations. A news release should be sent out before and after every event on campus. Be sure to work with the public relations people in your institution. Most of them are very happy to know that you are interested in what they are doing and they can provide much help in formulating a plan to get the most out of your public relations efforts.

Other activities are not so obviously public relations, but they are very important. Events which bring people to campus, such as quiz bowl competitions and meetings of education-related organizations like Phi Delta Kappa and reading organizations can offer favorable exposure of the education program. College sponsored activities indicate that people are interested in education in general and not just as it relates to the institution specifically. Faculty involvement in elementary and secondary schools sends the message that we are sharing the expertise we have to offer, rather than hiding in an ivory tower. Faculty involvement with future teachers' organizations would seem to be an especially effective recruiting tool. There are many

possibilities for activities for future teachers which would keep them involved and interested in education. The involvment of education majors in these activities is also desirable. All of these activities increase the visibility of the institution and the education program. When public school students frequently see education faculty members in their schools, they are more likely to think of education as a potential major. These activities won't hurt your NCATE evaluation, either.

Remember the booth just inside the college gate in the model? This is where the student buys the ticket to get in, or pays the fees. If we can make the ticket cost less, we may make it possible for some of the best and brightest to attend college. Anything which will make a student's education more affordable will help in recruiting. The first step is to ascertain that students are receiving all the financial aid that they can qualify for. Scholarships can be awarded specifically to education majors who meet certain requirements and to entering students who plan to major in education. Funds for such scholarships can come from a number of sources. They can come from endowments which are specifically earmarked for such purposes and which are administered by the institution's development personnel. If your institution does not have such a scholarship fund, discuss the possibility with the development people.

Another source of scholarship funds is the education societies on your campus. They often raise money to use for scholarships. They should be encouraged to initiate endowed scholarship programs, too. This requires investing a portion of

the money raised each year for several years. At some point, the interest earned is sufficient to fund a scholarship. While this plan results in less money for scholarships initially, a long-term commitment is established and fund raising is made easier as time goes by.

Wnen scholarships are awarded, we should make a big deal of them. For entering freshmen, a representative of the college or university should present the scholarship at the high school graduation or awards program if possible. A press release should be sent to the student's home town newspaper, along with a photograph of the presentation, if possible. A plaque with scholarship recipients' names or other appropriate recognition could be displayed in the college.

Direct faculty involvement in recruiting students is rarely practiced in education programs, at least up to this point. It has been common for years in fields such as music and art, and is spreading now to other fields such as engineering and agriculture. At least two Arkansas institutions had engineering representatives on the ArkACRAO recruiting circuit this year. Other institutions and areas of specialization will follow suit in the future. This practice gives them a chance to talk with high school students starting in their sophomore year. Students can be informed early of the special requirements and procedures for entrance into education, and they establish early contact with a faculty member in the program. Brochures on the education program are also an

excellent idea. These can be distributed by admissions personnel or by education personnel.

Videos are widely used in admissions now. Most are general recruitment pieces concerned with an institution as a whole. A video on the education program could be quite effective, however. In fact, it could serve two purposes. It could recruit students into the teaching profession and into your program in particular. Professionally made videos are expensive, but they are usually very good. An acceptable alternative can sometimes be prepared by students and staff members in your communications or journalism departments. While these usually are not as "slick" as the professionally

produced tapes, prospective students are often impressed by the fact that they were done on campus.

One commonly overlooked area for recruitment is right under our noses. That is, those students who enter college as undecided majors. Special programs such as receptions, open houses, and brown-bag lunches could be planned for these students. As a part of these activities, education-related clubs and organizations could be emphasized. Education faculty participation in career planning seminars and activities for students considering education as a major can be very effective. In some cases, it is possible for education faculty members to advise undecided majors. The idea is to present information and let students make up their own minds. High pressure sales techniques are counter-productive.

Effective introductory courses are also important. Students often take introductory courses to test potential majors. This is no place for yellowed notes and droning lectures. These courses call for faculty members who are models of excellence in teaching.

There is no one technique that will solve all recruiting problems. If you want the best and the brightest in education, your program needs to be the best and the brightest. And you have to let people know about it. All institutions have public relations and admissions people to work in these areas. But they can't do it all. If you want something beyond the minimum in these areas, you will have to put some effort into these activities, too. If you think that your job is only to teach classes, you may eventually discover that you have no classes to teach.

Plan now to get started in these activities, to expand on your current efforts. Do not look for a cookbook plan. Since no two situations are the same, no two plans should be the same. A faculty committee may be in order to come up with a plan. Look closely at your situation and decide what should be done. Of those things that should be done, what can you do? What resources do you have to work with? What talents do the personnel in your area have which could be channeled into some of these activities? Seek advice and guidance from the admissions, public relations, and development personnel at your institution. They may be surprised to see you, but most will be very happy to work with you after they recover from the initial shock.

Your goal is to bring the best students you can possibly get into your program. Be sure your program is worthy of them and then put every possible resource into a plan to bring them in.

Reference

Levine, A. & Associates. (1989). Shaping higher education's future: Demographic realities and opportunities 1990-2000. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.